

### 3. The Empress

*Be fruitful and multiply.*  
—Genesis

Whereas the High Priestess held herself back, the Empress, archetype of Earth, birth, and abundance, simply cannot contain herself. Water rushes into her garden. Towers of cypress flourish in her forest. The sun pours down to prosper the grains from which she will bake her breads. An extravagance of cushions pamper her (“The moment I saw them,” she says, “I just had to have them”). There is no want here, no lack; all needs and pleasures are royally indulged. The Empress seduces us, arousing our delight in the sensuousness of physical life. She waves us nearer with her Earth-orb scepter as if coaxing us to freely “Love! Emote! Savor! Partake!”



The motif on her shield, pillows, and gown is the astrological symbol for Venus, linking her to the planet's namesake, the Roman goddess of love and beauty. On the beauty side, the Empress adores all things pleasing to the eye. She puts a high value on keeping her appearance attractive, and her home comfortable and stylish. The loving aspect of the archetype is expressed in acts of generosity, tenderness, and compassion. She is the Universal Mother, patroness of nurturers and caregivers.

Anyone familiar with Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* will recognize the Empress/Universal Mother in the Ghost of Christmas Present. The spirit softens Scrooge's heart to the plight of the destitute and

warms the miser's dismal chambers with a breathtaking banquet. In our age, the archetype's compassion has been personified by the likes of Mother Teresa and Princess Diana, and by organizations committed to the guardianship of children, animals, and the environment. Whenever body and Mother Earth are honored as temples of the Divine, the goddess is present.

Nurturer though she is, the Empress deeply enjoys the carnal side of life. Many Tarots depict her sexual passion by showing its outgrowth—a swollen abdomen. Her pregnancy is not only a reference to literal motherhood but to the larger theme of birthing. We become the Empress whenever we deliver something new into the world, be it a child, an ink sketch, or a start-up business. Every birth, at core, is an act of self-expression. As the synthesis of One and Two, Three represents expansion and increase, an out-picturing of the creative intent.

The Empress at her most abstract represents Mother Earth, the essential forces of creativity and destruction. With a star for each month at her crown and a field of wheat below, she rules the seasons and the fruits born of them. She is the Mother of Matter (from *mater*, "Mother") in all its manifestations. Pomegranates, plump with the promise of fruitfulness, adorn her gown.

The Empress's myriad attributes connect her to a pantheon of love and fertility goddesses, including Juno, mother goddess of Rome. Juno was known also as *Moneta*, from which the word *money* is derived and in whose temple the first Roman coins were minted. Making money, like making babies, symbolizes generativity and increase, and as such is a vital aspect of the Empress. Yet many spiritually minded people who have no trouble appreciating the presence of God in the physical pleasures of the world tend to draw the line at money. Especially in abundance, it is seen as evil, dirty, a vice of the "filthy rich." But to the Empress, money is just another divine expression, as ripe with creative, nourishing potential as a field of wheat.

## THE MAJOR ARCANA

The amount of abundance we enjoy in any area of our lives—material, sexual, emotional—is affected significantly by our attitudes toward *receiving*. We don't have what we deserve, the saying goes, we have what we *believe* we deserve. Feelings of unworthiness, consciously held or not, can block the flow of abundance. In such cases, asking and receiving become associated with shame, guilt, or even the fear of punishment. In contrast, the Empress invites us to cultivate a motherly regard for seeing our wants provided. Only when we are rooted in self-love can there bloom a prosperous consciousness free of self-imposed limits on the goodness available to us.

Equally vital to prosperous living is selfless giving. In Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker*, the title character says, "Money . . . is like manure. It's not worth a thing unless you spread it around, encouraging young things to grow." Though the quote specifies currency, the principle applies to any resource we may have which, in giving it, benefits others. Whatever the form of our abundance, in sharing it we create new life.

The majestic multiplicity of the Empress was displayed for me one November weekend many years ago. While driving home from college with friends, a sudden blinding snowstorm forced our car off the road. Police eventually escorted us—and over a hundred other stranded motorists—to a shelter in rural Pontiac, Illinois.

The accommodations were not encouraging. Musty floor-mats and fold-up cots promised a skimpy sleep. Most of us went to bed with growling stomachs that night, wondering if the vending machine's snacks would last the length of our confinement. Outside, the snow swirled and deepened, burying the road and all trace of our vehicles.

Early the next morning, a blast of chill wind swept through an open door in the armory. A procession of farmers and locals trudged in, each carrying stacks of foil-covered trays. Our gasps turned to cheers as the smells of hot biscuits, coffee, and farm-fresh eggs

and sausages filled the crowded hall. No breakfast ever tasted so good, nor was more boisterously appreciated. When lunchtime came, another crew blew in with heaps of homemade fried chicken, vats of golden potato salad, and dish after dish of plump fruit pies. This would be topped by an evening feast so resplendent, so finely prepared, that our humble thank-yous as the farmers loaded our plates seemed wholly inadequate. And these people, braving the snow en route from farms and kitchens, fed us in this manner until the roads reopened two days later.

The event moved me with gratitude and awe. In one unforgettable weekend, I had experienced the Empress as Mother Nature in all her fury, and as Mother Comforter in all her endless generosity and compassion—one force as magnificent as the other.

### An Empress Story

"Last night I asked the cards what would make my headache go away," said Bianca, a Tarot student, "and I got the Empress. What's that mean?" I turned to the class and asked them what the archetype of nurturance might prescribe.

The responses were numerous and creative. "Just relax," "Pamper yourself with a long hot bath," "Ask your husband for a neck rub," "Get fresh air." To our surprise, Bianca blushed at the chorus of suggestions. "But I have kids," she said, as if that automatically canceled all options.

A couple of the mothers swiftly jumped in to challenge her excuse. They told Bianca she was missing an opportunity to model self-care for her children, if not robbing them of the chance to show a little support. Bianca dismissed them all with a skeptical look.

"Do you enjoy backrubs?" I asked her. She nodded. "Good," I said, "For the rest of the weekend I want you to ask your classmates for backrubs. They have a right to say no, but you must ask." Bianca

## THE MAJOR ARCANA

had long ago mastered the giving aspect of the Empress. For one weekend, though, she would have the opportunity to explore the archetype's capacity to receive in full self-worth.

### Empress Attributes

Key Words:	Sensuality, Compassion, Abundance
Being:	fertile, creative, compassionate, nurturing, generous, protective, prosperous, lavish, comfortable, healthy, sensual, seductive, emotional
Doing:	mothering, caretaking, nurturing yourself or others, showing hospitality, freely giving, openly receiving, appreciating or creating beauty, savoring comfort and pleasure, making or spending money, thriving
Shadow:	taking care of everyone but yourself, being overly protective, sensual overindulgence, material addictions
Reversed:	undernourishment, emotional coolness, infertility, denied pleasure, creativity blockage, negative body image, financial lack, frugality, moderation
	<i>Possible Advice</i>
Reversed:	"Let someone else play Mother for awhile." "Don't overdo it (eating, spending, entertaining, etc.)."

### Questions for Reflection

- How and when do you nurture yourself?
- What is the most memorable act of caring ever shown you?
- Who could benefit from your compassion, tenderness, or generosity?
- What is the most extravagant gift you have ever received or given?
- What pleasures do you allow or deny yourself?
- What do you find beautiful?